# SOUNDINGS

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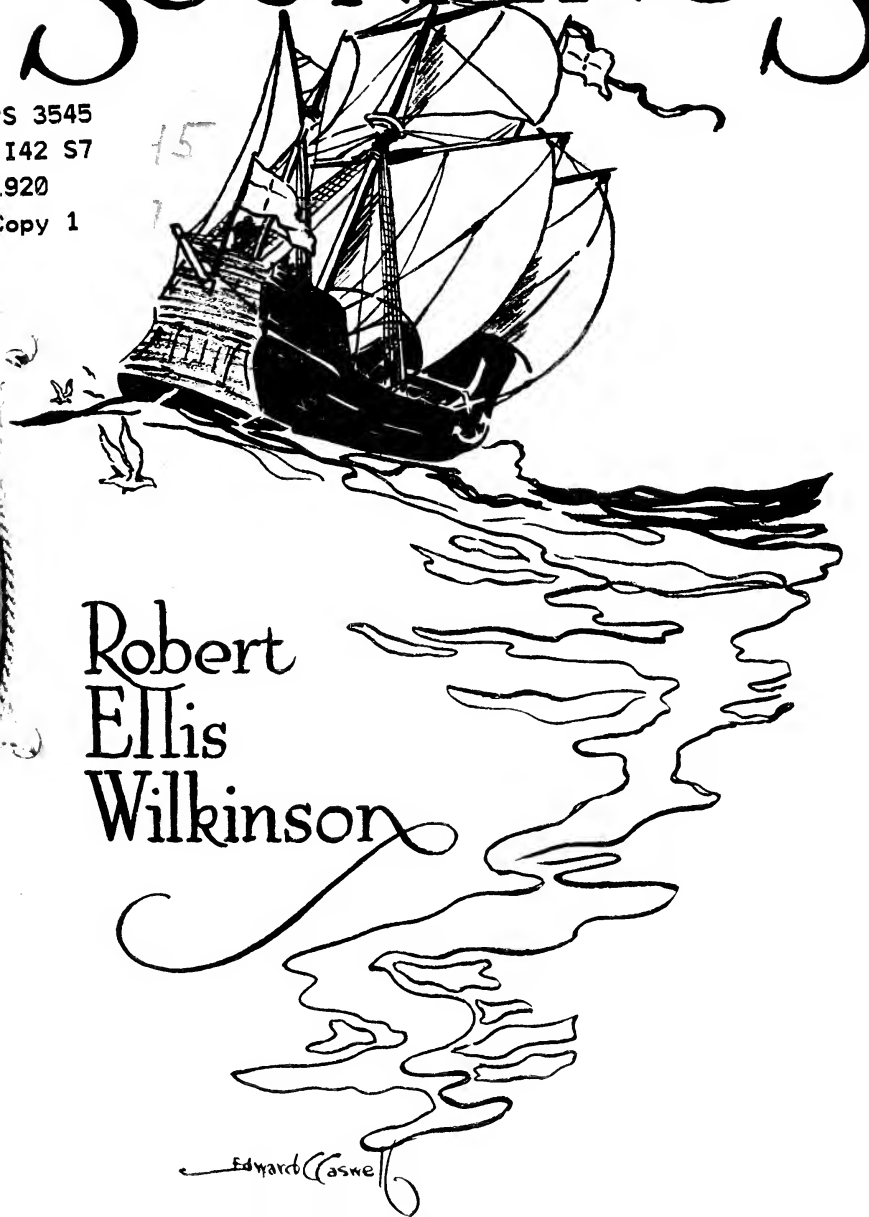


Robert
Ellis
Wilkinson

# SOUNDINGS

Being a number
of observations
charted on the
Log of Life

ROBERT ELLIS WILKINSON

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To
My Father

# Troubled Waters

## BELGIUM'S PRAYER

A peaceful country full of farms,
Of fishing towns and cities gay;
Swept by the force of war's alarms—
Gone are these scenes in one short day.
Lovely Louvaine, with all its joys,
As by a hurricane, mowed down;
Gone are its tumult and its noise,
Naught left but embers on the ground.
Rheims, its cathedral towering high,
One day exists, the next is gone,
And grey-clad Germans marching by,
Its fallen glory joke upon.
Oh God, we ask, is it too late,
Have we Thy children, erred too long?
Is Germany, imbibed with hate,
Its revelry with wine and song,
The thing the dear Christ died to save?
Has Belgium erred; is Wilhelm right?
What lesson's taught in ruined nave?
God on this darkness shed Thy light?

October, 1914.

## "SOMEWHERE IN FRANCE"

On the cold, damp sod a soldier lies,
  Fallen behind in the day's attack;
His face is turned to the azure skies,
  And he thinks of the home where he'll ne'er
    come back;

His eyes are filled with the unshed tears,
  That the thoughts of his home in the mountains
    bring
Then over his head the shrapnel jeers,
  And he tries to hiss at the hateful thing.

As he writhes 'neath the force of his stinging pain,
  Knowing that he so soon must die,
As he lies there helpless upon the plain,
  He offers a prayer to his God on high.

"Oh Father and Master of us all,
  Look Thou upon my happy home;
When I have heard Thy bugle call,
  War's horrors cease, no more I roam."

"I do not ask forgiveness for the sins
  Which I against Thy holy peace have done;
I do not ask that Thou wilt take me in,
  When Life's eternal battle's lost or won;"

"Look Thou upon my loving wife and child;
Grant that they never hear dread war's alarm
Of reeking tube and shrapnel screeching wild;
Oh Lord, protect my loving ones from harm."

"Oh Lord and Master in Thy care I leave,
All that is dearest in this life to me;
And with my heart's last blood I do believe,
That they will keep this lasting trust to Thee."

When he had finished with this last request,
His soul departed for a land unknown,
At last his restless spirit is at rest,
In that fair land above where dwell God's own.

God in compassion looking down to earth,
Has found the lonely little mountain home;
And with His love, to sunshine given birth,
And sorrow from it like a bird has flown.

September, 1915.

## THE P. O.'S ON PARADE

*To the men of "Bay 10" this poem is sincerely dedicated.*

You've seen marines in company front
Go marching in review,
You've seen the men from West Point,
And the men from Plattsburg, too;
Oh yes, we know they're clever men,
We know the sight they made,
But tell me, have you ever seen
The P. O.'s on parade?

They shovel coal,
They pick up "buts"
They dish out dirty mess,
They go on guard
With other gobs,
And clean machines, oh yes!
They're knocked around,
They're kicked about,
They're called each kind of pest,
But when they're marching on parade,
The P. O.'s are the best.

The skipper has a favorite stunt
Of holding bag inspection,
To see if all his salty men,
Can pass his keen detection;
Has hammocks laid upon the deck
To see if they are clean,
But the P. O.'s marching on parade,
Is the best sight he has seen.

They dig in dirt,
They handle bales,
They haunt the riggin' loft,
They wrestle with
All kinds of jobs,
Then hear their life is soft;
They work all day,
They work all night,
They never have a rest,
Yet when they're marching on parade,
The P. O.'s are the best.

The regimental adjutant
Begins to swear and cuss,
He says the P. O.'s never work,
They only yell and fuss;
But he always has the sense to see,
The error he has made,
As he views the P. O. company
When marching on parade.

They march with "boots"
They work with "boots"
'Till "boots" think they are dust;
They mark their clothes,
They heal their woes,
Then have to stand their crust;
Each bugle call, they hate 'em all,
And still, their mind's at rest,
They know when marching on parade,
The P. O.'s *are* the best.

September, 1918.

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NOTE:

*P. O.*: Petty Officer—One who rates with but after everybody.

*Gob*: Nautical name for an enlisted seaman.

*Skipper*: The commander of a ship or station.

*Mess*: An affectionate name for food.

*But*: Another name for a cigarette stub gleaned by hand from the sodden soil.

*Deck*: Not a deck of cards.

*Riggin' loft*: Where the ship's lines, thrum mats, fenders etc. are found.

*Boot*: Naval rookie.

## GETTING RESTLESS

Andersonville, Sing Sing, Portsmouth,
Prisons, on doubt you will state,
But friends, were you ever in training,
Here, you're a toy of fate.

In Sing Sing you know that you're staying,
Know when your time will expire,
But here you are constantly praying,
To creep from behind the barbed wire.

Gad, but we're tired of waiting,
God knows we want to fight,
We kick at each raise in rating
We'll gladly be seamen, that's right!

We enlisted to fight for the Belgians,
The freedom of land and of sea,
We signed up to slaughter the Germans,
Who threatened the World's liberty.

But here we all sit by the wire,
And long for the life on the wave,
God knows while we sit by the fire,
Folks never will say that we're brave.

So ship us north, south, east, or westward,
We don't want an officer's snap,
All we want is the wind to the starboard,
And a chance to get into the scrap.

September, 1918.

## THE SPIRIT OF THE WAR

Shells shrieking, seething,
Over the fields of France;
Comrades crying, dying,
Killed in the great advance;
Cannon rumbling, tumbling,
Over the muddy road;
And all with the time forcasting
The end of an awful load;

Farmhouses fiercely flaming,
Fired by German guns;
Sufferers shivering, shaking,
Driven by cruel Huns;
Restless refugees reaching
Stations along the way;
And everyone dreaming, longing,
For the coming of the great day;

Paris, peaceful, persistent,
Silent in her distress;
Englishmen, eager, excited,
Marching in service dress;
Yankees, yearning, youthful,
Starting for fields of fight;
And all of them anxiously pressing,
Their striving with might for the right;

Italians, insistent, imploring,
With only one thought supreme;
Defeating, destroying, dismasking,
The Austrians fairest dream;
Belgians bravely beloved
By all of the civilized world,
For theirs is the cry of freedom,
And ne'er has their flag been furled;

Japanese jabbering joyous,
Liberty anxious to spread;
Eager, excited, enlightened,
Pressing and surging ahead;
Russia's ruins restoring,
A country they once have fought;
Anxiously aiding to rid the world,
Of that one black Prussian spot;

Six sturdy supporters,
Of all that is honest and right;
Fighting fiercely, forever,
The Hun to supress by just might;
Calm, controlled, courageous,
Ever a golden light
'Till Night shall be conquered by honor,
And Liberty's torch shall shine bright.

August, 1918.

Belgium, broken and bleeding,
Had stood with her back to the wall,
Tho' her cities were lying in ruins,
"They must be held!" was her call;

France, with her fighting legions
Had given red rivers of blood,
To check and to turn back forever,
The onrushing demon flood;

England, the bull dog of nations,
Defiant, rushed into the fray,
But even the England of history,
Alone, could not win the day;

Italy, nation of music,
Of history, art, and romance,
Spurned for a time the artistic
To hold back the plunderer's advance;

These, with each true ally nation
Which heeded humanity's call,
Held the lines back in sheer desperation,
Held their backs to that wavering wall.

The ne'er trampled emblem of Belgium,
England's cross, the cross of Saint George,
The fluttering Italian banner,
France's tri-color, tried at war's forge;

Had held back the onrushing legions,
'Till they felt they must surely retreat,
Felt themselves slowly pushed backward,
Yet dared they not think of defeat;

When they saw on the distant horizon,
A wonderful banner appear,
Its stars shining bright thru the battle,
A banner that never knew fear.

Your own Stars and Stripes flying freely,
And each star a beacon on high,
Each bar, red and white, was a promise
That Liberty never can die.

America sending her answer,
Sending her stars in the night,
A light in the dark hour of peril,
A hope that was firm-set and bright.

But remember,—America's answer,
Those stars on a background of blue
Can only continue resplendent
When supported by her people—you;

America's war is for freedom,
This freedom is resting with you,
Would you grovel ignobly in bondage,
Or, will you see the thing thru?

"We'll see it thru!" is your answer,
For you've all of the fire of France,
You've the same bull dog spirit as England,
And forever your cry is, "Advance!"

Then give you of your hoarded millions,
Back those who have already gone,
Help to spell out in unfading letters,
Their motto, "Let's go! On, March on!"

*Written on the fourth Liberty Loan.*

## A BETTER 'OLE

Bairnsfarther drew a cartoon,
About a better 'ole,
Where one could crawl away from harm,
Nor be a German goal;
I wonder if he ever saw
A place as safe as ours,
Where he could laugh at shrapnel hiss,
And pass the weary hours;
Well this was once a German trench
But now its owned by Yanks
So he could rest in peace, nor fear
Surprise by German tanks,
That Yankee bunch will never turn
To run from any Hun,
So he can have his other 'ole,
We've stole a better one.

October, 1918.

## OLD PAL

There are pals who 've grown together,
From the time that they were kids,
They have passed thru stormy weather
That the god of friendship bids;
There are pals who've met in school days,
Brought together there in sport,
Pals who, lost in darkened pathways,
Sought books as a last resort;
Yes, and pals whom threatening danger,
Thrust in one anothers arms,
Or, while shilding unknown stranger,
Felt the power of woman's charms;
There are pals that you remember,
There are pals you can't recall
When the flicker of an ember
Casts their face upon the wall;
But, old pal, I'll ne'er forget you
For you're not a one of these,
And I'll think of how I met you,
While we longed for open seas;
Think of how we swung together
In a barracks called a bay,
Think of how in stormy weather
We stood guard both night and day;
I'll remember in life's morrow
When my head is bowed and grey,

How you left me, pal, and sorrow
Fills my heart, old pal, today;
Go, God's blessing rest upon you
May your days be long and bright
May His angels watch and guard you
'Till the day of judgement's light.

December, 1918.

# Peaceful Waters

Joy, sorrow, childish prattle too,
All have their own appointed day;
How dull this life would seem to you,
If ups and downs should pass away.

## CONVALESCENCE

Flowers, sweets, long tender notes,
All are but paltry things,
When placed beside the feelings found
Where'er true friendship rings.
Flowers may bring faint perfumes rare
From out long hidden bowers
And picture tears on memory shed
A language found in flowers.
Sweets, too, may tell of thoughtfulness
Thru hours of dark distress,
But none can speak of a sorrowed heart
Sorrow words can't express—
Naught but unburdening of one's soul
Can love's true tale confess

Oh for an hour, dear, with thee,
To sit there by thy side,
With heart so light and fancy free,
To roam love's countryside.
Castles we'd build with towered steeps,
Set by some turquoise sea;
Woodlands where tinkling brooklets creep
Would sing their songs to thee,
Perchance we'd wander in country lanes,
'Mid wild nodding golden rod,
Or gazing afar on a desert plain,
Worship some pagan god.

But ever I'd have you by my side,
Wherever our fancies flit,
And ever I'd sorrow when you cried,
Or rejoice when I cheered a bit.

So remember, dear, as I convalesce,
Here on my counterpane,
Each night I pray God on high to bless
And bring me to health again;
I pray for the day when again we'll be
Sitting, dear, side by side,
When you will be telling your dreams to me,
And I may in you confide;
So peacefully sleep in your curtained bed,
And sometimes, dear, dream of me,
For God and his angels on guard overhead,
Will bring me, dear, soon to thee.

September, 1918.

## "THE MASTERPIECE"

A roar like mighty rushing waters,
  A tinkle like the silvery bells
Of sleighs across the frozen ground;

  The soft, sad music of a broken heart
Or tears shed o'er a lovers grave
  Joy, sorrow, deeds long left undone;

All flow in one unendless stream
  Of emotions from the organs depth
All follow in the melody,

  Each one a lesson in itself,
When by a noble hand combined,
  Create a masterpiece sublime.

  August, 1917.

## "JUST LONESOME"

Have you smelled the fragrant woodland,
Smelled the balsam and the fir;
Have you fancied crackling back logs,
Simmering apples on the grate;
Heard the laughter of the children
Cracking chestnuts from the burr;
Have you, friend, had such a picture
Snatched away by hands of fate?
Have you heard the soughing pine trees,
Restless with a winter wind;
Have you seen the pale moon's shadow
Paler shine from off the snow,
Heard the wandering wolf pack howling
Their lament to all mankind
As you tramped the death-still woodland?
If you have, my friend, you know;
You know why I'm so downhearted
On this lonely Christmas eve,
Know just why I miss the Northland,
With its ice and winds and snow.
It's the "Wanderlust" that's calling
With its power to make us grieve;
Calling, "Back to old Alaska!"
And, my friend, I've got to go.

December, 1918.

## "HUC VENITE PUERI UT VIRI SITIS"

From the uppermost peaks of the mountains,
  From the valleys, from lake, and from plain,
From the furthermost parts of the oceans,
  By motor, by greyhound, or train,
You come to this temple of learning,
  To a school that is beaconed in fame,
And a spirit within you is burning,
  To fight for her honor and name.
And this, you who come here remember,
  As you work at your books, and in play,
That each Exeter man is an ember,
  Which kindles that beacon each day.
So to each, as you enter this doorway,
  We give, as was given us then,
The lamp that will lighten your pathway;
  "Come, boys, that you may become men."

Written to the entering class at The Phillips Exeter Academy in the fall of 1915. The Latin is the school motto.

## THE CAMP ON WILLOW CREEK

What's that you say, haint never heered tell
O' the camp on the bend down at Willow Crick,
Whar the fog rolled up so cussed thick
You could take a knife and cut it? Well!

Laws, whar you been these thutty years
When the country's changed to this minin' town,
When Bill was livin' and Greaser Brown,
And Lariat Jim was ropin' steers?

Huh? Been down in Texas, Rio Grande?
Flirtin' with Spanish gals on doubt
Tryin' to cut them greasers out
And burnin' love fires all over the land.

Wal, me and Jim, He's dead three years,
And Greaser Brown, he uz popped off too,
Was wonderin' what we was goin' to do
When old Bill Slocum sold his steers;

When we heered o' this guy Sutter's find
O' golden nuggets as big as pears.
Well sir, we threw to the deuce all cares
And on findin' some gold just sot our minds

O' course we knew down around the bend
('Twas on a bend Sutter had his mill)
We could feast on gold layin' hill on hill,
And we made up our minds we'd try to the end.

So we got together with Trooper Joe,
He's a fellow the fort down below couldn't hold,
And loaded with shovels from top to toe,
We started to dig for the gol durned gold.

Well sir, the first day it come and it went,
The second was like it and so was the third;
The grub was most eaten the money was spent,
And we started worse cussin' than you ever heard.

Well, the Forth of July, hot, hell's fire aint no more,
When Bill was a makin' the sweat run a stream,
He let out the gol durndest cussedest roar,
And Joe down beside him he started to scream;

Well, we all hustled down to the spot there by Bill
And there in his shovel a glitterin' bright was
Was the gold. Oh Lord! how we dug in that hill;
Then we went into town on a blow-out that night.

We shared in the profits we got from the gold
And bought out the town on that Forth of July;
We'd crackers and rockets for young folks and old,
And everythin' else that our nuggets would buy.

The next mornin' early we stocked with supplies;
With tents and with cookstoves and shovels
galore,
And even with cheese-cloth to keep off the flies,
And we went into business, Jest we, and no more.

Make money? say, do you think we'd do it for
fun?
If you do jest get out with a background o' blue
And look at the muzzle o' this blamed old gun,
'Till I fill you with holes till the light'll shine
thru.

February, 1916.

## GO TO CALIFORNIA

Have you felt the zephyrs blowing
From a far-off distant shore,
Have you pictured glittering beaches
Heard the restless billows roar,
Have you longed to go out yonder
Where the breeze-tossed grapevines sway,
Have you never had that aching
To pack up and go away?

Pilgrim Boston has its pleasures,
New York City many more;
What care you for Boston pleasures?
Go! forget New York's great roar!
Take the train for CALIFORNIA
Where the golden fishes gleam,
Where the black-eyed Spanish maidens
In the sunlit patios dream;

There you'll see the golden glory
Of the sun, at close of day,
There, are dreamy orientals,
There, the twinkling lanterns sway.
War-struck Europe has her troubles,
You too have a heavy load,
But forget it and go westward
Take the nation's progress road.

There the yucca's tall stalk spires,
There the poppies bloom and die,
There the century plants in blossom
Tower to the cloudless sky.
In this setting of fair nature
White-walled convents stand serene;
'Tis no wonder kind old padres
Like to worship mid this scene;

In this country rich with beauty
Work is play, and troubles flee,
There you'll get a hearty welcome,
There folk, friends are sure to be;
Go, neglect, forget your worries
As all care-free people do,
For I know that California
And the west's the place for you.

September, 1914.

## A DREAM AT SUNSET

The haze of the old past has lifted,
The curtains of life parted wide,
And down thru the ages has drifted
A vision of love's countryside.

The little thatched house with its welcome,
At the end of a long country lane,
With its garden of foxglove and primrose,
And the lilacs in bloom just the same;

The river that wound 'mid the hedgerows,
The notes of the nightingale's song,
The sweet quiet hours at even',
When the toil of the day had been long.

A breath of the perfume-hung garden
She seemed as she stood waiting there,
Her cheeks were a bloom of carnation,
Like the fair nodding snowdrop, her hair;

Her eyes were like blue-bells of Scotland,
Her lips had been kissed by the rose,
To me she was Love's fairest treasure,
Just Love from her head to her toes.

I've met many a fair city maiden,
Maids who others have told me were fine,
But none hold the place in my memory,
Of that dear grey-haired mother o' mine.

March, 1919.

## VERMONT TO THEE

Green mountains that rise to the heavens,
  Feet kissed by the early morn's dew;
With folk free from malice's leaven,
  And hearts that are loyal and true.
For the murmuring pines of the forest,
  For the rivers with music so sweet,
For the plenteous crops at the harvest,
  Our tributes we lay at thy feet.
For Allen and Baker, thy heroes;
  For Admirals Dewey and Clark
Who fought on the sea's restless billows
  A nation to lead from the dark.
For these, yes and many another,
  In this country so wild and so free,
Thou, the source of those blessings, our Mother,
  VERMONT we pay homage to thee.

December, 1915.

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